

Carpenter starts union homebuilder business

A sluggish construction market has turned Carpenter Zak Silva into a union homebuilder. The 30-year-old member of Carpenters Local 1388 started ZNK Homes, LLC in June 2008, after he was laid off as a superintendent for LCG Pence Construction.

"The idea is to build back the residential market," said Silva, who joined the Carpenters Union as an apprentice 13 years ago. "Right now, there is no union market share. If we bring back residential market share, that inherently builds market share on the commercial side."

Silva hired two seasoned journeymen — Bob Gerstlauer, a 22-year member of Carpenters Local 247, and Gary Harrington, a longtime member of Local 1065, plus first-year apprentice Tyler Mincemoyer, a member of Local 1388.

Silva admits the timing was bad for homebuilding. But he has kept his crew busy primarily doing home remodels and small commercial jobs.

In June, he landed his first home from the ground up. It's a 2,400 square foot, four-story house in Northeast Portland off Burnside Street.

"This is the first home — other than my own — that I've worked on in 25 years," said Gerstlauer, who had been out of work for seven months before go-



Bob Gerstlauer, Zak Silva and Tyler Mincemoyer, all members of the Carpenters Union, build a home in Northeast Portland. Silva owns ZNK Homes, LLC. He started the company after being laid off as a superintendent for a large general contractor.

ing to work for ZNK.

"Most of the nonunion sector build the same as I do," Silva said. "They just pay their employees less and put more in their pocket."

Silva entered the Carpenters apprenticeship out of the Job Corps. He initially was a member, treasurer, and delegate of Local 2130 before it merged with Local 1388. He worked as a journeyman Carpenter, foreman, and general foreman for several large general contractors before taking on the role of superintendent.

"Home owners have all of the same



needs and desires of a high rise client and deserve the same service," Silva said.

To find out more about ZNK Homes, call Silva at 503-317-2134.

Labor Day PICNICS

Labor Day – Monday, Sept. 6

Every year, labor unions throughout the state hold Labor Day picnics. Here is a list of picnics.

PORTLAND – Oaks Amusement Park in Southeast Portland. 10 a.m. – 5 p.m., with a brief program at 1 p.m. Sponsored by the Northwest Oregon Labor Council. Call 503-235-9444 for more information.

BEND – Pioneer Park (NW Wall St.). 12:30 p.m. – 3:30 p.m. Music, games, fun for the whole family. Sponsored by the Central Oregon Central Labor Council. Contact Linda Bradetich at 541-350-0965 for more information.

EUGENE/SPRINGFIELD – Jasper Park Shelter 4 (12 miles southeast of Eugene in Springfield/Pleasant Hill) starting at noon. Parking is \$5 and the park is along the McKenzie River. Please bring a side dish. Sponsored by the Lane County Central Labor Council. Contact Cj Mann at 541-913-0056 for more information.

MEDFORD – Tou Velle State Park, 8425 Table Rock Road, Central Point. 11 a.m. – 4 p.m. Donations accepted and there is a \$3 charge for parking. Music, games, and fun for the whole family. Sponsored by the Southern Oregon Central Labor Council. Call Kathy McUne at 541-664-0804 for more information.

NORTH BEND – Ferry Road Park. 11 a.m. – 3 p.m. This is a celebration of the 31st picnic sponsored by the Southwestern Oregon Central Labor Council. Call Shawn Jennings at 541-396-3244 or e-mail at shawngj@msn.com, Robert Westerman at 541-756-3907 or e-mail at ibew932@verizon.net, or Jan Long at 541-347-9120 for more information.

SALEM – Riverfront Park. 11:30 a.m. – 2:30 p.m. Music, games, and fun for the whole family. Sponsored by Marion-Polk-Yamhill Central Labor Council and AFSCME Local 2067. Cost: Two food items per person for the food bank or purchase script. Call Keith at 503-400-115 for more information.

THE DALLES – Sorosis Park Shelter. 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Hamburgers, hot dogs, condiments, soft drinks, paper plates and plastic utensils will be provided. Bring chips, salad or other potluck items, and lawn chairs. This picnic is put on in conjunction with the Mid-Columbia Labor Council.

OREGON STATE FAIR – The Oregon AFL-CIO labor booth in the central canopy area continues to be staffed with union volunteers during the entire two weeks of the fair, including Labor Day.

Lack of union workers hinders offshore oil industry

By DEAN CORGEY

I have lived in Houston all my life and have worked in the local maritime industry in various positions including mariner, regulatory advisory board member and elected union official. I have been a proud member of the Seafarers International Union for my entire career, dating back to 1973. I have enjoyed the warm cocoon of security that our industry has provided to carry us through good and bad times relatively unscathed.

Our region has been blessed by reliable employment and a low cost of living, which make this an attractive place to work, live and play — largely thanks to a vibrant oil and gas industry. However, recent local developments have caused me grave concern, and I think we are in the worst economic peril I can remember in my 57 years of living and working in Houston.

Specifically, the loss of the BAE Systems plant in Sealy, the potential for massive job losses at NASA and the planned relocation of Continental Airlines corporate headquarters to Chicago should worry any Houston resident. Of course, the concerns don't end there. The Deepwater Horizon disaster, the resultant moratorium on deepwater drilling and growing opposition to all offshore oil and gas exploration and production present the possibility of unprecedented job losses and economic chaos for Houston and the entire Gulf Coast region. A reduced offshore oil and gas industry in Houston could devastate our port and real estate

markets as well as reduce revenue to city, county and state government at a very inopportune time.

Deepwater oil and gas drilling is a marvel of modern technology and a testament to American engineering and innovation that we should all be proud of. The Gulf of Mexico contains large reserves and is the country's ace in the hole for economic security and national defense. In my view, this is no time to abandon one of our greatest energy assets. Instead, we should look for ways to change how business is conducted in the Gulf to ensure that this tragedy is never repeated. This raises the question: What's wrong in the Gulf of Mexico?

We think the answer is simple. The offshore exploration, production and service industry in the Gulf of Mexico, to the best of our knowledge, is 100 percent nonunion and increasingly foreign. Past attempts to organize these workers have been met with bitter opposition — not from employees but from employers. These largely anti-union employers struggle in a volatile, hyper-competitive environment that has resulted in unsafe working conditions and unstable employment. Lack of union representation has denied oil-field workers a voice in the workplace, which in turn has created an out-of-control industry with little oversight or accountability. It is painful to see oil-soaked birds receive more media attention than injured, deceased or displaced workers. It is also painful to see the lack of an organized workers' voice in the

legislative and regulatory processes contribute to 11 deaths and the worst spill in U.S. history. This clearly did not have to happen.

In my experience, the most effective health, safety and environmental programs are a three-legged stool consisting of a committed employer, effective government regulation, and meaningful safety provisions contained in a binding union contract subject to a grievance and arbitration procedure with teeth. We practice this model in the deep-sea, U.S.-flag fleet with measurable success. I served on the Towing Safety Advisory Committee of the United States Coast Guard in the early 1990s following the Exxon Valdez disaster and participated in advising the Coast Guard on writing the regulations for the Oil Pollution Act of 1990. I also served on the Area Maritime Security Committee of the Department of Homeland Security for the Port of Houston following the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attack and participated in writing the original Port Security Plan, which became the model for security plans nationwide. After Exxon Valdez and the 2001 terror attacks, government, industry and labor worked together to accomplish something positive for the nation. This model must be replicated to save our domestic offshore industry.

The obvious question now is, how do we fix the Gulf of Mexico? Some ideas to be considered from a labor perspective include:

- Re-establish Jones Act provisions on the outer

continental shelf to require American companies to operate American vessels, built in America, employing American workers subject to U.S. government oversight and labor laws.

- Swift passage of the Employee Free Choice Act to allow offshore workers to freely organize unions without the threat of reprisal or retaliation, thus forming a unified voice to promote the interests of their brothers, sisters and industry.

- Explore ways in which government, labor and the offshore industry can work together to improve safety, health and environmental conditions, save jobs and regain a positive public image for the industry.

The American political system is based on checks and balances. This evidently does not currently exist in the Gulf as can be evidenced by representatives for deceased Deepwater Horizon workers being either aggrieved family members or personal injury trial lawyers. These workers would clearly be better served by the unified voice of effective trade unions to help protect the environment, proactively work to prevent the need for personal injury representation and ensure that all workers safely return home to their families. That's the union way and that's the American way.

(Editor's Note: Dean Corgey is vice president of the Seafarers International Union's Gulf Coast District. This column appeared in the Houston Chronicle.)